

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### LABOR'S SCHOOL GARDEN PLAN NEEDS RETHINKING

Labor risks perpetuating a single model in promising to expand the number of schools with kitchen garden programs. In failing to consult with organisations already engaged in the educational use of school gardens, Labor risks implementing an expensive model.

Labor has promised to fund an expansion of The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden programs with a total allocation of \$12.8 million over four years. The programs, which educate students in growing, processing and cooking food produced in school gardens, are seen as a tactic in the national campaign to improve the diets of children and reduce the epidemic of childhood obesity.

"We applaud Labor for making this commitment and acknowledge the good work the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation (SAKGF) has done to put school gardens on the map", said Ben Neil, CEO of Cultivating Community.

"However, we feel that each school should be able to decide which model best fits its capacity and not have a rigid structure imposed on it."

Cultivating Community, an associate of the national organisation, the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network, has trialed a successful kitchen garden project with SAKGF at Collingwood College, in Melbourne, and is assisting other schools develop similar projects.

"It is odd that the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network has not been consulted by Labor, considering it is the only organisation to have held national conferences on school kitchen gardens in Adelaide, Brisbane and Melbourne".

There are a number of organisations able to assist schools to develop food gardens, instigate healthy food programs and integrate activities into the curriculum at a fraction of the cost of the SAKGF model. Added to this is the lost opportunity to incorporate environmental education within the SAKGF approach.

"Labor would do well to carefully consider the different models of delivering school garden education programs, their costs, affordability and effectiveness rather than leap in with just a single structure. We would like the opportunity to discuss this further with the ALP", said Mr Neil.

#### **One size doesn't fit all**

"Will the schools have to follow the strict Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden approach?", asked Mr Neil. "Cultivating Community's experience has shown that one model does not fit all and that many students would miss out on the kitchen garden experience because their schools would not have the capacity or space to develop the SAKGF model.

"There are a number of Melbourne schools such as Kings Patch, Fitzroy Primary and St Peters primary that are good examples of school garden programs that are flexible and that meet the needs of individual schools."

In other states, East Perth City Farm in Western Australia and Growing Communities in Brisbane already provide schools with edible garden services, however Labor has failed to contact them. In Sydney, Randwick City Council assists schools in the municipality with its Sustainable Schools Initiative and on the NSW South Coast, CareDesign is supported by local industry to deliver a schools garden program.

The idea of using food gardens in schools for educational purposes was pioneered in Australia by now-retired Brisbane teacher, Carolyn Nuttall, author of the book, *The Children's Food Forest*. It was further popularised by a 1995 course at Adelaide's Black Forest Primary School food garden/outdoor classroom (started 25 years ago) by New Zealander, Robina McCurdy.

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